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ABSTRACT

To assist the learner of English as a second language in dealing with American holiday celebrations (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Independence Day) a series of dialogs, comprehension questions, readings, and points of discussion are presented. The text is illustrated. (JB)

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STUDENT LESSON #16
CELEBRATIONS
UNIT I—HOLIDAYS

English for Living

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UNIT I — HOLIDAYS

OBJECTIVES

When you finish this module you will be able to:

1. Explain what people do on:
   a. Halloween.
   b. Thanksgiving.
   c. Christmas.
   d. New Year's Eve.
   e. Memorial Day.
   f. The Fourth of July.
   g. Labor Day.
2. Explain why Americans celebrate these holidays.
3. Explain what to do on personal occasions, such as the birth of a baby, a birthday, a wedding, an anniversary, a funeral.

SITUATION SETTER

Americans celebrate many special days and holidays. Some of the holidays are religious days, such as Christmas. Others are patriotic holidays, such as the Fourth of July. Some are days for special traditions.

OCTOBER

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Columbus Day	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 Veteran's Day	25	26	27	28	29
30	Halloween 31					

HALLOWEEN

BACKGROUND

At the end of October, Americans celebrate a day that has special traditions for children. It's called Halloween, and everyone has a lot of fun.

DIALOG 1A

It is October 25th. Manuel and his son Chepo are talking about Halloween, which is on October 31st.

Chepo: Dad, can I go trick-or-treating on Halloween? All my friends are going trick-or-treating.

Manuel: What's trick-or-treating?

Chepo: It's something children do after dark on Halloween. They put on costumes, so they look like ghosts, witches, or other strange things.

Manuel: What do they do?

Chepo: They go to people's houses and knock on the door. When someone opens the door, they say, "Trick-or-treat." The people who open the door usually give them a treat, such as candy or cookies.

Manuel: What if they don't give them a treat?

Chepo: Then the children sometimes play a trick. They may put soap on the windows, or throw an egg at the house.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. When is Halloween?
2. What does Chepo want to do on Halloween?
3. What is trick-or-treating?
4. What do the children wear when they go trick-or-treating?
5. What do they sometimes do if they don't get a treat?

MINI-DIALOG

It is Halloween. There is a knock on Manuel's door.

Children: Trick-or-treat!
Manuel: Hi! Have some candy.
Children: Thank you. Goodbye.

MICROCONVERSATION: Practice this conversation with another student.

Student A: Have some candy.
apples.
cookies.
gum.
Student B: Thank you.

DIALOG 1B

Manuel and his friend Pepe are talking about Halloween.

Manuel: Do we have to work on Halloween?
Pepe: Yes. It's a holiday, but we still have to work. Halloween is a day when children have fun.
Manuel: Why do people celebrate Halloween?
Pepe: It's an old tradition in England. On Halloween, people say that the spirits of dead people walk around, and it's supposed to be an important day for witches.
Manuel: Do Americans really believe that dead people walk around on Halloween?
Pepe: No, they don't. It's just a tradition.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Is Halloween a holiday from work?
2. Why do people celebrate Halloween?
3. What is supposed to happen on Halloween? Does it really happen?

READING

Americans make jack-o'-lanterns on Halloween. Jack-o'-lanterns are lights made from pumpkins. People put them in a window, or outside their houses. Here is how you make a jack-o'-lantern:

To make a jack-o'-lantern you will need a pumpkin, a sharp knife, a spoon, and a candle.

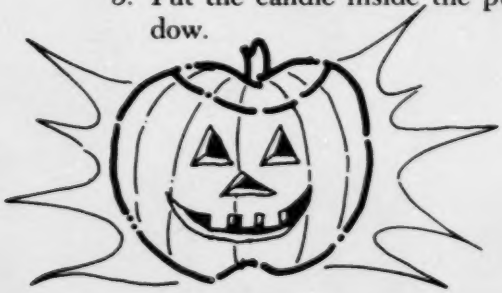
1. Buy a pumpkin.

2. Cut around the top of the pumpkin with a sharp knife.

3. Take off the top. Scoop out the inside of the pumpkin with a spoon.

4. Draw a face on the pumpkin. Most people use triangles. Cut out the triangles with a knife.

5. Put the candle inside the pumpkin. At night, light the candle. Put it in a window.



POINT FOR DISCUSSION

Do you have a day like Halloween in your country?

ROLE PLAY

Have a Halloween party. Make a jack-o'-lantern, and wear a mask or costume. Happy Halloween!

THANKSGIVING

BACKGROUND

In November, Americans celebrate Thanksgiving. It is a day that families celebrate together. Americans usually eat a big dinner on Thanksgiving.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
NOVEMBER		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 Thanksgiving Day Alicia's house	25	26
27 First Sunday of Advent	28	29	30			

DIALOG 2A

Today is November 20th. Manuel and Beatriz have received an invitation to go to Alicia's house on Thanksgiving Day.

Beatriz: We're invited to go to Alicia's house on Thanksgiving Day. She's going to cook a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.
Manuel: When is Thanksgiving?
Beatriz: This year it's November 24th.
Manuel: Isn't Thanksgiving always the 24th of November?
Beatriz: No, it isn't. It's always the fourth Thursday in November, but the date is different each year.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. When are Manuel and Beatriz going to Alicia's house?
2. What is Alicia going to do?
3. When is Thanksgiving?
4. Is Thanksgiving on the same date every year?

DIALOG 2B

Manuel and Beatriz are at Alicia's house. It is Thanksgiving Day.

Manuel: Why do Americans celebrate Thanksgiving?
Alicia: It's a day to say "Thank you" for a good year, and for a good harvest.
Manuel: When was Thanksgiving first celebrated?
Alicia: The first Thanksgiving Day was in December 1621.
Manuel: Why did they celebrate?
Alicia: The first white people that came to this country came from England. They were called Pilgrims. They had a very hard year, and they wanted to celebrate living through that year. The Pilgrims also wanted to say "Thank you" because the seeds that they had planted had grown, and now they had enough food.
Manuel: What did they eat?
Alicia: They ate fruit, vegetables, turkey, and pumpkin pies.
Manuel: Oh, is that why Americans eat turkey and pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving Day?
Alicia: Yes, turkey and pumpkin pie are part of the traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do Americans celebrate Thanksgiving?
2. When was the first Thanksgiving Day?
3. Why did they celebrate the first Thanksgiving?
4. What did they eat?
5. What foods are part of a traditional Thanksgiving dinner?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have a holiday like Thanksgiving?
2. Do you have a way of saying, "Thank you for a good harvest," in your country?
3. Do you think that it is a good idea to have a holiday like Thanksgiving?

READING

Americans make pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving dinner. Here is how to make a pumpkin pie.

1 9-inch pie crust (you can make it, but it is easier to buy one in the grocery store)
1 ¾ cups of canned pumpkin
1 1/3 cups of sweetened condensed milk
1 egg
½ teaspoon (tsp.) salt
½ tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. nutmeg
¼ tsp. ginger
1 cup of hot water

1. Heat your oven to 375 degrees
2. Beat all the ingredients together
3. Pour into the pie crust
4. Bake 50 to 55 minutes

ROLE PLAY

It's Thanksgiving. Have a party. Eat some pumpkin pie, and sing some songs.

CHRISTMAS

BACKGROUND

The "holiday season" begins with Thanksgiving, and lasts until New Year's Day. It is a happy time, and a busy time. Americans buy Christmas gifts, go to parties and decorate their homes for the holiday season.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	DECEMBER			1	2	3 shopping with Alicia
4	5 Hanukkah	6	7	8	9	10 Christmas party
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25 Christmas	26	27	28	29	30	31

DIALOG 3A

It is December 3rd. Beatriz and her friend Alicia are shopping.

Beatriz: There are so many people shopping! Are they all shopping for Christmas?

Alicia: Yes, they are. This is one of the busiest times of the year for the stores. Everyone is shopping for Christmas gifts.

Beatriz: Americans must give many gifts for Christmas.

Alicia: Yes, they do. They usually give gifts to everyone in their family, and sometimes to their friends.

Beatriz: What are these boxes of cards?

Alicia: These are Christmas cards. People send them to people they know, and especially to their friends and family who live far away. It's a way of saying "Merry Christmas."

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What are Beatriz and Alicia doing?
2. Why are so many people shopping?
3. Who do Americans give Christmas gifts to?
4. What are Christmas cards for?
5. To whom do people send Christmas cards?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you celebrate Christmas in your country? How?
2. Do you give Christmas gifts in your country?
3. Do you have any other holiday when you give gifts?
4. Do you think it is hard to shop at Christmas time? Why?
5. Do you send Christmas cards in your country?

DIALOG 3B

Beatriz is going to a Christmas party. She has to bring a grab-bag gift, but she doesn't know what it is.

Beatriz: What's a grab-bag gift?

Alicia: You have to buy a small gift that would be good for anyone who chooses it, and bring it to the party.

Beatriz: May I give it to anyone that I want to?

Alicia: Usually all the gifts are put in a bag. Each person takes a gift from the bag.

Beatriz: It sound like fun!

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is Beatriz going?
2. What does she have to bring?
3. What is a grab-bag gift?

MICROCONVERSATION: Practice this conversation with another student.

Student A: You're invited to a party on December 10th.
Student B: Thank you. Should I bring something?
Student A: Bring a grab-bag gift.
gift for a woman.
gift for a man.

DIALOG 3C

Manuel and Pepe are talking about Christmas trees.

Manuel: Why are all these trees for sale?
Pepe: They're Christmas trees. People put them in their houses and decorate them. Then they put the Christmas gifts under the tree, before Christmas.
Manuel: What do they use to decorate the tree?
Pepe: They put colored lights on the tree, and colored balls. They usually put tinsel or "icicles" on it also. There are many other things that can be put on the tree.
Manuel: Why are Christmas trees used at Christmas time?
Pepe: No one knows for sure. It is a very old tradition that comes from Europe. There are different stories about why they are used.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do people put the Christmas gifts?
2. What do they put on the Christmas tree?
3. Why are Christmas trees used?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have Christmas trees in your country?
2. Do you have a tradition like the Christmas tree?
3. Have you ever decorated a Christmas tree?
4. What kinds of decorations did you use?

MICROCONVERSATION: Practice this conversation with another student.

Student A: I'm going to decorate my house for Christmas.
Student B: Oh? What are you going to do?
Student A: I'm going to decorate my Christmas tree.
put a wreath on my front door.
put lights on the tree in front of my house.
put Christmas lights in my window.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

It's Christmas time. Have you decorated your house? Tell about the decorations you used.

DIALOG 3D

Chepo and his father are talking about Santa Claus.

Chepo: Dad, I want Santa Claus to bring me a bicycle, a train, and a baseball for Christmas.
Manuel: Who's Santa Claus?
Chepo: On Christmas Eve he goes around the world and brings the children what they want for Christmas. He fills their stockings with candy and toys.
Manuel: How does he know what they want?
Chepo: They write him a letter, or talk to him at a department store.
Manuel: Oh, is he that fat old man with the white beard who wears a red suit?
Chepo: Yes, that's him.
Manuel: Does he bring everyone toys?
Chepo: He just brings toys to the children who have been good.
Manuel: Where do you put your stocking?
Chepo: I'll put it near the fireplace. Santa Claus comes down the chimney.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Chepo want Santa Claus to bring him for Christmas?
2. When does Santa Claus come?
3. How does Santa Claus know what the children want?
4. What does he look like?
5. Where does he put the candy and toys?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have a tradition like Santa Claus in your country?
2. Are there any special Christmas traditions for children in your country?
3. Do you think that there really is a Santa Claus?

DIALOG 3E

Beatriz wants to know what happens on Christmas Day.

Beatriz: What do people do on Christmas Day?

Alicia: The children get up very early to see what Santa Claus brought them. Later, everyone sits near the Christmas tree.

Beatriz: What happens then?

Alicia: They open the gifts that are under the tree. Sometimes they sing Christmas songs.

Beatriz: Christmas is a religious day. Do people go to church?

Alicia: Yes, some people do. They can go to church on Christmas Eve, or on Christmas Day.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do children get up early on Christmas?
2. When do people open their Christmas gifts?
3. When do people go to church?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you do on Christmas Day in your country?
2. Do you think that many of the things that Americans do on Christmas are religious?

MICROCONVERSATION: Practice this conversation with another student.

Student A: Tomorrow is Christmas. Merry Christmas!
Happy Holidays!
Season's Greetings!

Student B: Thank you, and a Merry Christmas to you!
have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

ROLE PLAY

Have a Christmas party. Decorate a Christmas tree, and sing some Christmas songs.

DIALOG 4

New Year's Eve (December 31st) is celebrated by most Americans. Manuel and Beatriz are invited to Alicia's New Year's party.

Beatriz: What kind of party is a New Year's party? Maria says she's invited many people.

Manuel: It'll probably be a noisy party, and people will drink a lot of wine and other drinks. It's time to forget the old year and celebrate the beginning of a new year. People like to be with their friends on New Year's Eve.

Beatriz: Will it last very late?

Manuel: Oh, yes. Midnight is the best part of the party. Everyone gets a noisemaker, and makes noise with it. We'll probably sing "Auld Lang Syne."

Beatriz: What's "Auld Lang Syne"?

Manuel: It's a song that's usually sung at midnight on New Year's Eve. It's about remembering old friends.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where are Manuel and Beatriz going?
2. What is a New Year's party like?
3. What happens at midnight?
4. What is "Auld Lang Syne"?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you celebrate the new year in your country?
2. Do you celebrate the new year on the first of January?
3. How long does your celebration last?
4. What is your "New Year's" called?

MICROCONVERSATION: Practice this conversation with another student.

Student A: What are you doing on New Year's Eve?
Student B: I'm going to a party.
having a party at our house.
going to the Golden Flame Restaurant.
going to watch television.
going to Times Square, in New York City.

PATRIOTIC HOLIDAYS

BACKGROUND

Memorial Day, a patriotic holiday, is celebrated in May. The biggest patriotic holiday is the Fourth of July, which is America's birthday. The summer season ends with Labor Day, in the beginning of September.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 Mother's Day	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 Memorial Day	31				

MAY

DIALOG 5A

Americans celebrate many patriotic holidays. One of these is Memorial Day. Manuel and Pepe are talking about Memorial Day.

Manuel: We don't have to go to work on Monday. It's a holiday. What are we celebrating?

Pepe: Memorial Day is a day for Americans to remember servicemen and women who died in wars.

Manuel: When did Americans first celebrate Memorial Day?

Pepe: The first Memorial Day was in 1866. Memorial Day began in Waterloo, New York.

Manuel: Is Memorial Day always the last Monday in May?

Pepe: Yes, it is.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. When is Memorial Day?
2. Why is there a Memorial Day?
3. When was the first Memorial Day?

POINT FOR DISCUSSION

Do you have a day like Memorial Day in your country?

DIALOG 5B

Manuel: What do Americans do on Memorial Day?
Pepe: There are parades, and sometimes there are speeches. Many people decorate the graves of dead members of their families.
Manuel: Do people also have fun on Memorial Day?
Pepe: Yes, they do. Memorial Day means the beginning of summer to many people. If the weather is good, they have picnics.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What do Americans do on Memorial Day?
2. What does Memorial Day mean to many people?

READING: THE FOURTH OF JULY

The Fourth of July is the biggest patriotic holiday. It celebrates the birthday of the United States. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed. It said that Americans did not want to belong to England.

DIALOG 6

Beatriz and Alicia are talking about the Fourth of July.

Beatriz: What do Americans do to celebrate the Fourth of July?
Alicia: Most people don't work on the Fourth of July. There are parades. You can hear firecrackers, and at night there are fireworks.
Beatriz: Can we buy some firecrackers?
Alicia: No, we can't. They are dangerous, so they are not sold in stores in New York State.
Beatriz: Where can we see fireworks?
Alicia: Let's look in the newspaper and find out where there will be fireworks. There are always places on the Fourth of July where you can go to see special fireworks displays.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the Fourth of July?
2. What happened on July 4, 1776?
3. How do Americans celebrate the Fourth of July?
4. Why can't you buy firecrackers?

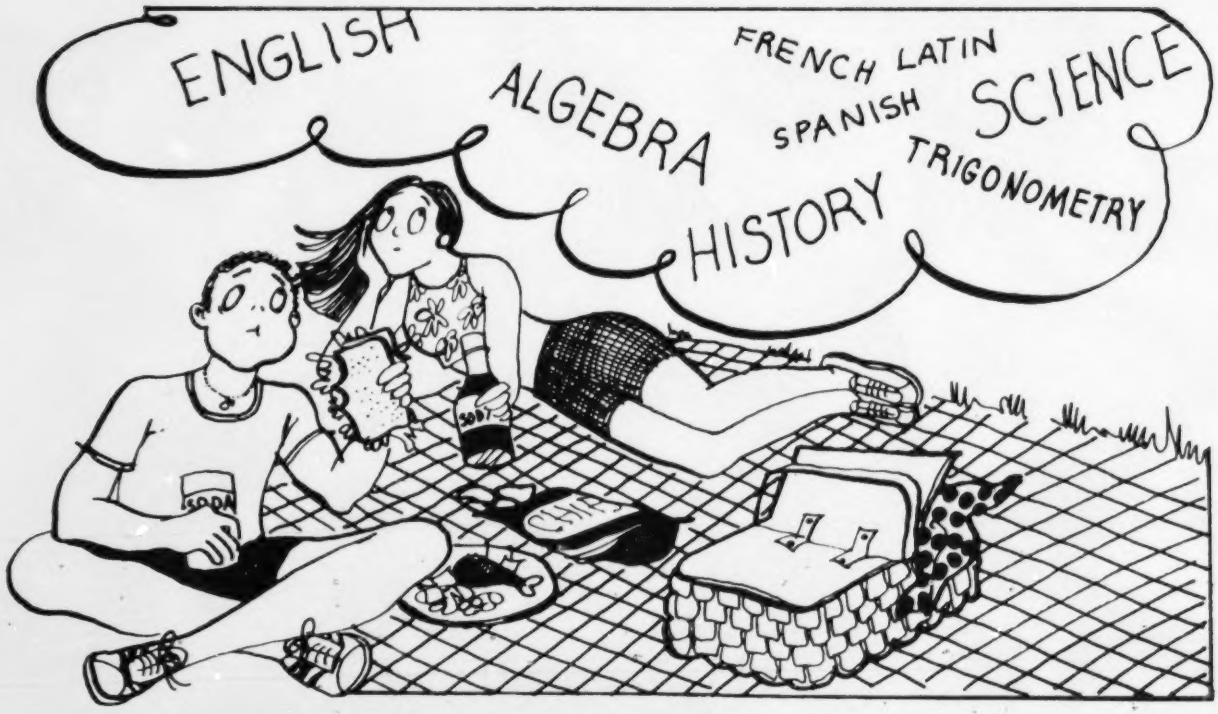
POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have a holiday like the Fourth of July in your country? Tell about it.
2. Why are fireworks dangerous?

MICROCONVERSATION: Practice this conversation with another student.

Student A: What are you going to do on the Fourth of July?

Student B: I don't have to work, so I'm going on a picnic.
I'm going to watch a parade.
I'm going to see the fireworks.
I'm going to listen to a speech.



DIALOG 7

It's September 1st. Pepe and Manuel are talking about the holiday on Monday.

Manuel: What's the holiday on Monday?
Pepe: The first Monday in September is Labor Day.
Manuel: What's Labor Day?
Pepe: Americans believe that it's important to work hard. Labor Day's a day to honor all people who work.
Manuel: Is that all Labor Day means?
Pepe: It's also the last celebration of the summer. It's the end of vacation, and school will start soon.
Manuel: What do people do on Labor Day?
Pepe: Because Labor Day is on Monday, most people have three days of vacation. They often go on a trip. They may also go on a picnic on Labor Day.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What holiday is the first Monday in September?
2. What is Labor Day?
3. What else does Labor Day mean?
4. What do people do on Labor Day?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have a day like Labor Day in your country? When is it?
2. What do you do on that day?